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## THE LATIN GRAMMARIANS AND THE LATIN ACCENT

Abbott's interesting theory of a pitch-accent in Latin, employed by the educated, by the side of a stress-accent in the speech of the people, derives perhaps its strongest argument from the practical unanimity with which Latin writers themselves describe their accent in terms of pitch. Yet I am inclined to suspect that Lindsay may have put his finger on the true explanation of this practice when he says (*Lat. Lang.*, p. 152):

The Greek accent itself had probably at the time of these grammarians already entered that process of change which ended in the stress accentuation of modern Greek. The Greek writers on accentuation would no doubt go on using the terminology of earlier phoneticians, without perceiving that their terms and descriptions were now no longer so applicable to the actual phenomena as they had once been; and if the Greek contemporary theorists on accent misused the terminology in this way, a Roman imitator might be excused for carrying the misuse a little further in applying the same terminology to Latin accentuation.

Besides, if, as is quite possible, the Latin accent, while primarily a stress, involved also a tendency to raise the pitch (as in English, French, Spanish, etc.), this really secondary factor may well have contributed to its identification with the Greek accent. We must not forget that the Roman writers were steeped in Greek traditions and can hardly have been skilled observers of phonetic phenomena. Wackernagel remarks (*Beiträge zur Lehre vom Griechischen Akzent*, p. 14) that "die Alten (und zwar nicht bloss erst die zunftmässigen Grammatiker) aus ihrem Akzent bloss das musikalische Moment heraushörten und das damit verbundene expiratorische Moment gar nicht der Beachtung würdigten."

But before this explanation of the attitude of the Roman writers toward their accent can be definitely accepted we must be satisfied on two points: First, was the shift in Greek accent from pitch to stress achieved, or at least well under way, as early as the time of Cicero and Varro, who describe Latin accent with Greek terms? Second, was this shift general, or was it confined to the vulgar?

It must be admitted that the evidence does not allow of a categorical answer to either question. Kretschmer (*K. Z.* XXX, 591 ff., cited by Abbott) has gathered, chiefly from papyri, a number of examples (greatly augmented by Mayser's recently published *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri*) of the confusion of long and short vowels which show that quantitative distinctions, beginning to be obscured in the third century B. C., were pretty well broken down during the second and first centuries. Kretschmer's explanation, since quite generally accepted, of this phenomenon connects it directly with a shift in the character of the accent from pitch to stress. This shift he therefore places—"wenigstens in der

länge und kurze verwechselnden Vulgärsprache" — somewhere in the last two centuries B. C. Unfortunately we cannot be sure that the age of Cicero, though falling in the latter part of this transition period, saw its consummation. Yet it seems not improbable that when Cicero and Varro were writing, Greek was spoken by the common people with an accent not essentially differing from the Latin (predominantly stress-) accent. Whether the pitch-elevation which very likely accompanied the stress in many (perhaps most) cases was as great in Latin as in Greek cannot be determined, but this is not essential to the present discussion.

To answer the second question, whether the shift was general, or confined to vulgar pronunciation, the material presented by the papyri does not help us. Abbott finds in spellings like *ῶντος* for *ὄντος* proof of "a marked difference . . . between the pronunciation of formal Greek and vulgar Greek" (pp. 457 f.), and it is therefore not surprising to find him taking the next step, and assuming that the two accents which he supposes existed side by side in Latin were paralleled by the conditions in Greek just before the beginning of our era (p. 459). But it appears to me that this is to overinterpret Kretschmer's evidence, which establishes a difference between formal and vulgar Greek in *spelling*, not in *pronunciation*. The ignorant man who wrote *ῶντος* for the traditional *ὄντος* probably did so because to his ear the first *o* was different from the second. But his better-educated contemporary who kept the old spelling may, for all we know, have pronounced the word precisely as he did. One might as well argue that the observance of classical quantities in the work of late poets is evidence that the pronunciation of the learned differed from that of the people. To discredit this argument one has only to mention the quantitative Latin verse of Petrarch, Milton, Munro, which surely proves nothing for their pronunciation.

Dionysius, it is true, gives us to understand that Greek accent in his day involved the rise of a fifth in pitch (*Comp.* 11), but the statement of Dionysius is much on a par with those of Cicero, Varro, and others for Latin, and can be reconciled, I think, with the theory that the Greek accent of his day was primarily stress. The Greek accent in its gradual transition from pitch to stress may be thought of as passing through the following phases: (1) Accented syllables were uniformly uttered at a higher pitch than unaccented ones. Stress, if present at all, was so slight as to be negligible. (2) There was a tendency to accompany pitch-elevation with increase of stress, but stress had not become an invariable factor, whereas pitch-elevation was still inevitably present in the accent. (3) Stress was now more marked than before and was always present in accented syllables. An accented syllable was *likely* to have a higher pitch, but did not *invariably*. (4) Stress was marked and universal, as in (3). Pitch was present or not, depending on various factors, e. g. the earnestness of the speaker, the importance of the word, etc.

If Greek was in the third of these phases when Dionysius lived (and Kretschmer's and Mayser's examples seem to prove that stress was not sporadic, but regular), the accent would be such as a modern phonetician would describe as predominantly stress. But the accented syllable, being usually uttered at a higher pitch than its neighbors, might conceivably appear to a man learned in the theory of earlier days as distinguished from the unaccented one by the difference in pitch alone. Moreover, we must not forget that Dionysius is not here discussing accent, *qua* accent, but the μέλος of speech, which he contrasts with the μέλος of song and instrumental music. To reconcile his words with the supposition that the accent of his day was a stress (among the educated as with the masses) we are compelled to discredit his statement only so far as to regard him as mistaken in thinking that pitch-elevation was *invariably* present in the accent. It would seem therefore that there is no adequate reason for assuming that the educated Greeks with whom Cicero and Varro conversed used an accent materially different from that of the people who wrote the papyri.

I cannot agree with Abbott in seeing an argument for a musical accent in the late rule about circumflex and acute in monosyllables. There may well have been in Latin, as there is in English, what might be termed a stress-circumflex—where the stress increases and then dies away. Donatus and Diomedes may have had in mind such an accent when they formulated their rule. The *name* is of course borrowed from the Greek, and it is hardly to be doubted that the Latin writers who employed the name thought that they had an accent equivalent to the Greek περισπωμένη. But the περισπωμένη of Donatus' time was unquestionably much, if not exactly, like the ὀξεῖα, and even that of Cicero's time (assuming that some speakers still distinguished it from the ὀξεῖα) was probably more like the stress-circumflex than like the tone-circumflex of the days of Plato. It may, of course, have involved an appreciable pitch-slide as well, as in English in, e. g., a surprised and drawled out "ah!"

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#### COMMENT ON PROFESSOR FOSTER'S NOTE

Professor Foster's analysis of the changes which the Greek accent underwent is not only valuable in itself but will make it easier for us to accept the interpretation commonly given in this country to the passages in which the Latin grammarians deal with accent, if certain facts can be established. If it can be shown, for instance, that by the time of Varro and Cicero the shift in the Greek accent from pitch to stress had become an accomplished fact, not only in the language of the illiterate, but for all classes of people, so that the Greek and Latin accents were similar in